

Multicultural Libraries' services and social integration: The case of public libraries in Montreal Canada

M. A. Paola Picco

ABSTRACT. Montreal is a multicultural city, with a high percentage of immigrants where great value is given to culture. The city has a network of public libraries, which are located in the different districts. The provincial government has just opened the new Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec, which combines a national library service with those of a public library. The Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec and the public libraries in Montreal have set a goal to facilitate the integration of immigrants into Montreal society. In this context, the objective of this research is to find out to what extent the public libraries in Montreal are facilitating the integration of immigrants into society and to discover what important role the libraries actually play in this process.

KEYWORDS. Public libraries, immigrant integration, multicultural services

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INTRODUCTION

Public libraries are considered useful social instruments in the democratization of information; in the support of education and life long learning activities; in the development of personal creativity; and in the promotion of local culture. They are regarded as agents for social change.

Throughout the years, public libraries have been able to adapt their services in order to reach the interests of their users. At first, they offered only printed material. Today, they offer information in all formats and they are active promoters of the use of new technology. They have been able to adapt to the changes in society and go far beyond their mandate to serve their users.

Trying to adapt to the social changes, multicultural library services have appeared in countries with a high number of immigrant populations where multicultural policies have been adopted. These public libraries developed services, which allowed the immigrants to be in contact with their cultures. They also provided them with the necessary tools for integrating into their new society. Immigrants need different kinds of information to be able to understand the way the new society works and public libraries can offer them this information. Examples include: language courses, workshops on citizenship education, how to find a job, etc.

Montreal is a multicultural city, with a high percentage of immigrant people living there. The city boasts 55 public libraries. In April 2005 the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec was opened, and the new services have a great impact throughout the province.

Montreal was selected by the United Nations as the "World Book Capital City" from April 2005 till April 2006. In the year 2005 a consultation of the population was held in order for the local government to adopt a cultural policy for the city. In the document of the Ville de Montréal (2005 b) "Montréal Métropole Culturelle: proposition de politique de développement culturel pour la Ville de Montréal", the city is defined as "ville de la culture, ville d'avenir" "Montréal affirme aussi que la culture est un moteur essentiel de son développement, de son dynamisme économique et de sa prospérité future" (Ville de Montréal, 2005b, p.3).

In this context, considering a city with a large immigrant population, where culture is given so much value and which defines

itself as ethno cultural, this research will show the contribution of public libraries in Montreal in the integration process of the immigrants to a country where the importance of multiculturalism is promoted through its legislative system. In order to evaluate the public libraries' commitment to immigrants, this article will identify the development of special services and special collections to meet immigrant needs, the competency and training of staff dedicated to immigrant services, and the relationship between public libraries and immigrant-serving organizations within the community. The relationship between public libraries and the immigrant organizations will also be considered.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this research is to find out to what extent public libraries in Montreal are facilitating immigrants integration into Quebec society once they have finished the integration programs of the Ministère de l'Immigration et Communautés Culturelles (MICC)¹.

This research will attempt to determine if these libraries offer services aimed at newcomers which will help them to integrate into this new society while allowing them to maintain their cultures and beliefs as supported by the multicultural legislation and policies of the country.

In order to carry out the research and achieve the proposed objectives, special attention will be focused on the commitment of the library to immigrants. Therefore, services aimed at immigrants will be identified, as well as, the features of the library collection and the skills of the personnel who serve this population.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to carry out the research consisted of interviews with qualified informants, as well as, content analysis of selected documents like the "Loi sur la Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec (2005)", "Diagnostic des bibliothèques municipales de l'île de Montréal" (Ville de Montréal 2005a), Gamache Vaillancourt's article "Les bibliothèques publiques ou la priorité des fins sur les moyens

(Gamache Vaillancourt 2001),” and “Montréal Métropole Culturelle: proposition de politique de développement culturel pour la Ville de Montréal (Ville de Montréal 2005b).” Three of the interviews were conducted with librarians working in the libraries, which offer services aimed at the immigrant population. In order to carry out the interviews, a list of questions was drafted which allowed collecting the necessary information from each library visited. Two other interviews were conducted, one with a person working in an immigrant organization and the other with the Councillor of the Villeray-Saint Michel-Parc Extension district where a public library which offers multicultural services, also part of this research, is located. The identified services aimed at immigrants were analysed using as a reference IFLA Multicultural Communities Guidelines for Library Services (1998). The libraries selected for the purpose of this research were: Parc Extension Library, Saint Laurent Library and the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

At least twelve services were identified in the visited libraries: multicultural collections; collections for the newcomers; newspapers in other languages; French and other languages courses; French literature workshops for immigrants; cultural activities, documentation centres with information on the neighborhood services, working workshops or services to facilitate the search for a job; libraries’ guided visits for immigrants, liaison agent services who encourages the links between the library and the community, “Livres dans la rue” and “Contact,” special programs offered by the Ville de Montréal. These services will be discussed further in this section.

In comparing the services available with the number of services actually offered in each of the sites, Parc Extension offers 92% of the available services, the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec 80% and Saint Laurent 50%. To calculate the percentage of services offered by the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec, “Contact,” and “Livres dans la rue” were deemed to be services offered in the neighborhoods and were therefore excluded from the tabulation of the services offered at the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec.

Taking the IFLA Multicultural Communities Guidelines for Library Service (1998) as a reference point to measure the commitment of public libraries in Montreal to the immigrant population, it can be stated that, in general, the three libraries visited in Montreal partially fulfill the Guidelines. The Guidelines grouped the services under 3 different sections: "Cross-Cultural Materials and Services," "Information and Reference Services" and "Extension Services." The twelve services identified in the libraries visited in Montreal are in coherence with what the Guidelines recommend as services to be offered by libraries serving multicultural population.

The following chart allows us to see how the services offered by the three libraries visited can be classified according to the three sections proposed in the Guidelines.

These services, which are commonly known as multicultural services, can be classified as services that promote the integration process and the cultural identity services. Thus, the collection for newcomers, language courses, workshops of French literature for newcomers, documentation center with information about the neighborhood services, working workshops or services which facilitate the job search, are classified as services which favor the integration process. "Livres dans la rue," "Contact" and the "Liaison agent" can also be included in this group. The Ville de Montreal organizes the first two services and they are held in the

TABLE 1. Services classified according to IFLA Multicultural Communities Guidelines for Library Services (1998)

Cross-Cultural Materials and Services	Information and Reference Services	Extension Services
Multicultural collections	Documentation Centre with	Ateliers of French literature
Collection for the	information of the	for newcomers.
Newcomers	Neighborhood services.	Livres dans la rue
Newspaper in other	Reference Service	Contact
languages		Guided visits for
Language courses		immigrants
Working workshops or		Liaison agent
services which facilitate		
the search for a job		
Cultural activities		

community. Even though they are services which promote integration, they encourage the children and the families in reading and using the French language.

The "Liaison agent," is a person, not a service. This person offers a service of vital importance to the integration of the immigrants by coordinating different activities with the community organizations, and contacting the immigrants directly. This agent is a link between the community and the library.

The multicultural collections, the newspapers in other languages and the cultural activities belong to the group of services which allow the immigrants to stay connected to their original cultures.

At this point, it is important to compare some of the services identified for immigrants and analyze their effectiveness. Although the multicultural collections can be classified as the service which fosters the links with the immigrants' cultures and traditions, it is considered important for this research since Canada is a multicultural country which promotes the right of immigrants to conserve their language and culture. For this reason, it is important to evaluate the development of these collections. Two of the libraries visited have developed multicultural collections. In Parc Extension Library the documents in languages other than English or French represent 15% of the total collection, while in the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec they represent 0.55% of the total collection. Saint Laurent does not have any material in the immigrants' languages because planners thought that it would inhibit the integration process.

If we take as a reference point the data provided by the Diagnostic des bibliothèques municipales de l'île de Montréal, the documents in immigrant languages represent 1.55% in the total of the public libraries on the island (Ville de Montréal, 2005a, p. 30). This allows us to see that the collections do not reflect the multicultural diversity of the population of Montreal. Although these collections will not impact on the integration process of the immigrants, the libraries serving immigrants should offer them as a way of acknowledging the freedom of immigrants to preserve their language and cultural traditions as stated in the Multicultural Policy which states the desire to:

recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society

to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage (Canada. 1985, Multiculturalism policy of Canada, p. 1).

In addition, from the quoted Diagnostic, it can be stated that only 5 libraries in Montreal offer more than 1% of their collections in the immigrant languages (Ville de Montréal, 2005a, Tableau No 10 p. 81).

On the other hand, the three libraries visited offer newspapers in the immigrants' languages, which can be considered a part of the multicultural collections.

The "collection for the newcomers" is offered in two of the three libraries visited: Parc Extension Library and the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec. The web page of the Montreal public library network shows that the Parc Extension Library is the only public library which offers this kind of service. On the other hand, the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec has developed such a collection, in agreement with the MICC, with the objective of facilitating the integration of newcomers into the society. These collections can be classified among the services which facilitate the integration process by allowing the newcomer to find practical information on how things work in this new society.

In addition, Parc Extension and the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec both offer language courses. The former offers traditional French courses and a computer lab, which allows the immigrants to learn more than 40 different languages. The latter offers only the computer lab. As it was stated before, these services form part of those which promote the integration process.

The French literature workshops for immigrants are offered in the two public libraries visited (Parc Extension and Saint Laurent). This service, which is classified as an integration service, allows the newcomers not only to improve the use of the French language but also to be in contact with Quebec culture.

Cultural activities for immigrants are held at Parc Extension and the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec, while Saint Laurent was not carrying out such activities at the moment the interview was carried out, but they are planning to start offering them soon. The libraries which are organizing cultural activities are those that have developed links with the community organizations. The Saint Laurent library had not developed any relationships with the community organizations when it was visited. However, it was planning to initiate a contact with

them. Cultural activities should be offered for the same reasons as the multicultural collections.

The Documentation service, which provides information about services in the neighborhood, is offered at both public libraries. The reference service each library has compiled provides useful information to answer any users' questions related to practical issues, thus allowing them to solve some of their problems or to find the required support. This is viewed as another important service facilitating the integration process.

Another service which encourages the integration process of the immigrants is offered through the workshops and resources dedicated to job searches which are promoted at Saint Laurent and the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec. The Saint Laurent Library supports the immigrants in their finding a job by teaching them how to prepare a résumé and where they can look for a job. However, the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec has an agreement with Emploi Québec, to facilitate access to different resources for people looking for a job. Although the Parc Extension library does not organize special activities in this regard, the library can provide relevant information to the users through the reference service that targets their particular needs on practical aspects.

At this point in the article we may conclude that the visited libraries are offering valuable services to immigrants. The next question is whether or not the immigrants are using the libraries.

In discussing the latter point, we cannot assess the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec because at the time of the research for this article, that the library did not gather information on the number of immigrants who were using its services. Though Parc Extension has a level of performance of 20%, and Saint Laurent reveals 22%, if the reader takes as a reference point the average of performance of the libraries on the island of Montreal (37.8%) (Ville de Montreal, 2005a, p. 90), it could be construed that both libraries fall below the level of performance of the average of libraries in Montreal. One of the first conclusions that can be drawn from this analysis is that the immigrants in Montreal do not go to the public libraries in the same proportion as other citizens of the island. The number of loans per capita also offers evidence about use. The number of loans is 28 documents per capita in Parc Extension Library, while in Saint Laurent it is 39.5. At this point, we can state that the level of

performance and the number of loans are directly related to the social profiles of the populations served by each library. Both have high proportions of immigrants, but the socio economic characteristics of the two user communities is very different. While in Villeray-Saint Michel-Parc Extension, the number of people with university studies represents 18.7%, in Saint Laurent this number increases to 33.6% (Ville de Montréal, 2005a, Tableau 2, p. 74). This situation helps explain why the population of Saint Laurent checked out more books than the population of Parc Extension. If the analysis is continued by using the socio economic indicators and consideration is given to the percentage of people at the lowest incomes, Villeray -Saint Michel-Parc Extension is at 40.7%, and Saint Laurent at 29.4%, which is the average for the city at 29% (Ville de Montreal, 2005a, Tableau 3 p. 74). In this regard, we can compare the level of unemployment of these two neighborhoods, which is 13.5% in the former and 9.6%, in the latter. As a reference point the city as a whole has an unemployment rate of 9.2%. Without the data to be definitive, the libraries' level of performance declined when socio economic indicators were below comparable statistics for the whole city.

It is also interesting to note that Saint Laurent, which offers fewer services aimed at the immigrants, has a higher performance than Parc Extension, which offers more services. This situation can be explained by the factors previously discussed. If the neighborhoods with the lowest socio economic conditions were those whose libraries demonstrate the lowest level of performance, it would follow that they would need to develop far more services in order to reach the non-user population. These neighborhoods are the ones with the highest percentage of under privileged population. As a result, these populations need further support and encouragement to use library services which are foreign to them.

Further to this discussion, it will be interesting to analyze the objectives the libraries set in order to design the services for their population. The staff at the three libraries visited stated that one of their main objectives was to integrate the immigrants into society. The three librarians interviewed expressed this concept in different ways: "make immigrants more integrated into society" "[...] integrate immigrants into society, make them feel they are at home" "[...] facilitate their lives in the city [...]". In the case of the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec, it was stated that law mandated integration

efforts. Nevertheless, it is crucial to see to what extent the interviewed librarians felt the libraries were able to support immigrant integration into society. One of the librarians mentioned the French courses and the support to the immigrants in their job search as a relevant service. Another one stated that the library should be regarded as a place where everyone can share their culture, know more about each other, exchange beliefs and traditions and support their continuing education. Finally, the third one referred to the opportunity provided by the library to immigrants to access useful information and leisure activity. These opinions concur with statements issued by the "Loi sur la Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec" (Québec, 2005, Chapitre II, p. 3) and the Ville de Montréal (Ville de Montréal, 2005b p. 23). As can be seen, both documents stated as an objective the facilitation of immigrant integration by the libraries. Although the librarians interviewed and the documents analyzed agreed that public libraries promoted immigrant integration into society, there was no agreement as to how public libraries should support this process. The three librarians interviewed mentioned different ways the library could facilitate the integration process of the immigrants. The two documents analyzed were limited to a mention of the objectives only, thus leaving a very large margin of interpretation on how these objectives could be reached. Operational guidelines for multicultural libraries services should be enunciated into clear policies supported by government. Immigrant integration services should not be left to develop as individual library initiatives. Governments of territories with a multicultural population should define precise policies for this kind of library, in which objectives and goals are clearly established and necessary resources provided. According to this statement and having as a reference the Loi de la Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec and the proposal for a cultural policy, it can be concluded that there is no clear policy in this sense. The Province of Quebec lacks an updated law for public libraries. Therefore, it can be stated that there is a lack of a legal instrument for the development of public libraries. As it was seen in the policies analyzed and in the law of the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec, the integration of the immigrants into society is mentioned as an objective. However, the document does not make a clear reference on the services the library should develop in order to facilitate the integration of immigrants. The data obtained confirmed this conclusion. The three librarians interviewed

quoted different services, that serve the integration of immigrants into society. This demonstrates that every library develops what it considers useful for the immigrants resulting in a certain disparity in the services offered.

Neither do the three libraries concur on a strategy to reach the immigrant population, as suggested by IFLA (IFLA, 2001). Two of the libraries visited did not have such a strategy to work with immigrants at the time of the interview, while the third establishes yearly objectives. In the case of Saint Laurent Library, the administration is reviewing its policies toward immigrants, and it intends to develop a marketing plan, which will allow the library to increase its immigrant user base. The Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec is also aware that it will have to identify the non-users and develop a strategy to reach them. Therefore, it can be stated that at the time of the interviews, the three libraries visited did not have a marketing strategy targeting the immigrant population, which would allow the library to identify the users' needs and, consequently, develop appropriate services to attend to their needs.

This study also examined competencies of staff required to operate a successful library immigrant integration program. The three librarians interviewed agreed that the staff of a library working with immigrants should meet special requirements. These included: being patient and proactive, being able to speak several languages, being open and respectful of other cultures and being prepared to adapt to the needs of the immigrants. Saint Laurent Library and the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec have immigrants on their staff. Unfortunately, no data about Parc Extension was available. However, in total the staff of Saint Laurent Library can speak more than 17 languages, while the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec has a mandate to employ people from the communities, and it has included many immigrants on its staff. In the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec, the multilingual staff works on the 2nd floor where the services aimed at the immigrants are situated. This point coincides with what the "Multicultural Communities Guidelines for Library Services" suggests on employing immigrants in public libraries. The guidelines state: "Libraries should reflect multicultural societies by the staff they employ, ensuring that the staff truly reflects the different ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups that the library serves" (IFLA, 1998, p.11).

The guidelines also recommend that:

Library authorities should institute continuing education programs designed to enrich the cultural and racial awareness of their staff and improve their abilities in dealing with their tasks in an ethnically linguistically or culturally diverse society (IFLA, 1998, p. 11).

In this regard, it can be pointed out that the public libraries visited are not offering any continuing education program for their staff, except for the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec, which at the moment of the visit was planning a training course through the MIIC.

Another important variable to consider is the relationships between the number of professional staff and the population the library serves. Libraries in Montreal are situated in 5th place as compared to seven other cities of Canada (Ville de Montréal, 2005a, p. 45). This brief examination of personnel demonstrates that the Montreal Public Libraries do not have the necessary staff to reach all the population. This is a very important point: If the libraries do not have enough staff they can neither increase the services offered nor concentrate their efforts on reaching the non user population. At this point, it can be concluded that there is a lack of staff in the public libraries in Montreal, and, in addition, the staff of public libraries working with immigrants do not receive the necessary training to cope with the needs of this population. However, the fact that the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec is planning to offer such a course together with the MICC should be flagged. This course would also be extended to the staff of all the public libraries working with immigrants.

The number of staff and the services offered by public libraries are directly related to the resources public libraries receive. The fact that public libraries in Quebec lack any legal instrument, which clearly establishes the resources the government should invest for their development, should be stressed. The economic situation of the libraries in Montreal is not flourishing. Despite the fact that Montreal places third among the cities which spend more resources per capita, they show a difference of \$25.6 from the level of the city which spends the most, and of \$14.8 from that of the second one,

leaving Montreal closer to those cities which spend less per capita (Ville de Montréal, 2005a pp.45–46). The different districts in Montreal provide different contributions, thus increasing disparities amongst the different public libraries.

Another variable that measures the commitment of Quebec libraries to immigrants is their collaboration with immigrant organizations, including staff qualified to coordinate cooperative activities with them. Two of the libraries visited maintain a close relationship with the immigrant organizations, and they have staff devoted to coordinate activities with them. The Saint Laurent Library has links with many of the organizations in the area, but at the time of the visit, it did not have a working relationship with them. However, the librarian interviewed mentioned that they were starting to develop this kind of relationships. In the other two libraries, they also have staff dedicated to working with these organizations, as is the case of the “liaison agent” at Parc Extension. The results of this research reveal that there is a direct correlation between the number of services aimed at the immigrants and the involvement the library has with the immigrant organizations. However, this same conclusion cannot be applied to the level of performance of the library. As was demonstrated before, Saint Laurent has a higher level of performance among its users than Parc Extension. Obviously, there are some external factors, some of which have already been analyzed, such as the social profile of the users. At this point, it is important to mention that Parc Extension is a very new library and is located in a district where there are two other libraries. This is not the case of Saint Laurent, which is the only library in the district. In order to draw a definite conclusion it would be necessary to have data available on the situation of the other libraries.

At this point, it can be affirmed that public libraries undoubtedly support the integration process of the immigrants into society. The three librarians and the councilor interviewed agreed on this. However, they mentioned some conditions: the first librarian said, “the library is one part of the chain which will facilitate the integration,” the second one stated that success will depend on the staff and immigrants. She added “libraries can be a very good tool for integrating people, but they should be more friendly and give immigrants more place.” The third one stated “the main goal of the

library is to make sure that there is enough information available to the immigrants and there is a need to train its staff to help with what the users are searching for." Again, it can be confirmed that in order to reach and support immigrants, libraries should meet certain conditions, some of which have already been discussed, such as working tightly with other organizations, possessing the necessary trained and professionally developed staff to work with immigrants, offering the required services and, of course, relying on some kind of economic resources.

The last point to examine is how public libraries could be excellent tools for supporting the integration process of the immigrants. In order to do so, the definitions of public library selected in the content analysis will be analyzed. As the Ville de Montréal stated, public libraries are the "gardienne et médiatrice de la connaissance [...]" "favorise d'autant plus l'exercice de la citoyenneté qu'elle est intégrée à sa communauté [...]" "instrument d'équité et accessibilité [...]" (Ville de Montréal, 2005a, p. 9). Hence, public libraries provide a context to the users where they can receive needed information, whether to increase their knowledge or their ability to actively participate in civic affairs. It can be stated that public libraries promote equality in society. Gamache Vaillancourt also agreed with the previous statement. In this regard, he states that the library, "[...] permet aux personnes issues de tous les milieux d'accéder à la connaissance [...]" "la bibliothèque publique permet aux gens de tous âges, de toutes origines et de toutes classes sociales de se ressembler, de socialiser" (Gamache Vaillancourt, 2001, p. 104).

The Ville de Montréal also cited that "leurs collections et leur action affirment en permanence la diversité et l'identité culturelles" (Ville de Montréal, 2004 p.22). This last statement should be understood in the context of a Montreal as a multicultural society. In this way public libraries, apart from promoting equality and active civic participation, also promote cultural diversity.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it can be affirmed that public libraries are useful tools for encouraging the integration process of the immigrants. The

three libraries visited in Montreal have developed services aimed at the immigrants and that they are in agreement with what the IFLA Multicultural Communities Guidelines for Library Services proposes (IFLA, 1998). The identified services not only promote the integration process but cultural links with their original cultures and languages as well. These services also cover different areas the population needs for its own development. If we compare the areas covered by the public libraries in Montreal with the mission statement of IFLA which is: "The primary purposes of the public library are to provide resources and services in a variety of media to meet the needs of individuals and groups for education, information and personal development including recreation and leisure" (IFLA, 2001, p. 2) it can also be affirmed that these objectives are being reached.

NOTE

1. The Ministère d'Immigration et Communautés Culturelles offers integration programs to the newcomers. These programs cover the first five years in Canada. However, it is well known that, in reality, integration is a much longer process.

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